

Executive Summary



A Vision for the Next Five Years

Building upon existing investments and branching out from Main Street, Nashua will transform itself from having a notable Main Street to being a great Downtown.

Introduction

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Nashua's history is its greatest amenity; it imbues the City with authenticity, character, and strength. Nashua's history is also its greatest teacher; its past teaches us powerful lessons about the importance of urban design. The Nashua Master Plan strives to recognize and leverage these strengths while incorporating the needs and demands of a globally competitive 21st century city. The execution of this Master Plan will set Nashua apart from its regional competitors, assuring its health, vitality, and sustainability for generations to come.

Nashua New Hampshire is strategically located on the Nashua River, where water could power the textile mills. The 1823 Plan for the City, drawn by Asher Benjamin established a remarkably powerful yet simple design concept for the City. The Olive Street Church and the Nashua Manufacturing Company were set on axis with each other, within walking distance, on opposite ends of Pearl Street. Storefronts and services for the town's people were located between these two landmarks. A longer avenue (the present Walnut Street) connected the Mill to the "South Commons." The first residential neigh-



borhood was established between the South Commons and the Mill . On any given day, one could walk from the Commons, to work, to Church, and to the stores lining Main Street.

The basic lessons from Benjamin's Plan were applied for nearly 100 years, until after World War II when its simple urban relationships were abandoned. In a desperate attempt to save its Downtown, the City embarked on an ill-fated urban renewal program.

Throughout the 1980's and 1990's, thanks to grassroots organizing and one small intervention after another, Downtown re-established itself. Today, it is a generally accepted fact that Downtown Nashua has a "nice Main Street." Sidewalks are lively, events well attended, and investment strong.

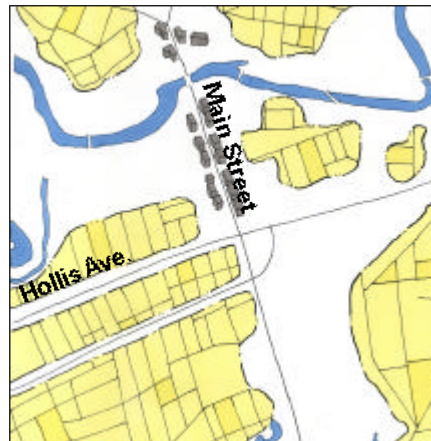
The general appearance of health however masks significant problems. Behind Main Street, the neighborhoods are fragmented and plagued by disinvestment. They are not connected physically or economically to each other or to Main Street. Furthermore, Main Street itself, south of City Hall, has been developed as little more than a suburban commercial strip separating the surrounding neighborhoods.

As one charette participant stated so clearly: "We have a good Main Street; now we need a great Downtown." The purpose of this plan is to accomplish exactly that task. It will do so by:

1 Referencing Nashua's primary amenity: Its heritage. The clarity of

Asher Benjamin's design has informed many aspects of this plan. Most notably, it serves as a constant reminder that great urban places encourage social interaction through a mix of uses, and that community building must be consciously designed at a human scale.

2 Strengthening Nashua's most unrealized amenity: Its natural resources, especially the Nashua River. Natural resources will act as a framework for the primary connections between neighborhoods and mixed use areas.



Downtown Today

A portion of Main Street is strong but many of the adjacent neighborhoods are fragmented and separated from this investment by busy arterial roads.



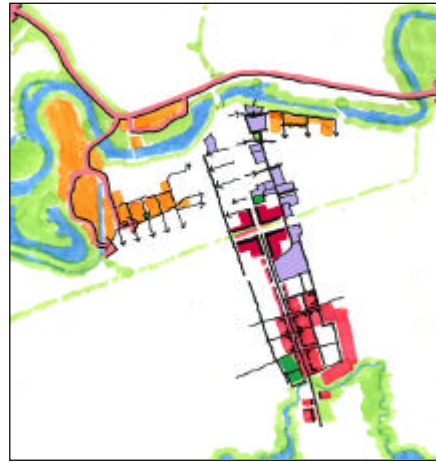
Downtown Tomorrow

Landmarks and public spaces are stitched together with trails and improved streets, thus strengthening the Downtown as a whole.

3 Representing a consensus vision for Nashua's future. The ideas and spirit of this document are a direct outgrowth of the intensity and passion Nashua's citizens have for their Downtown.

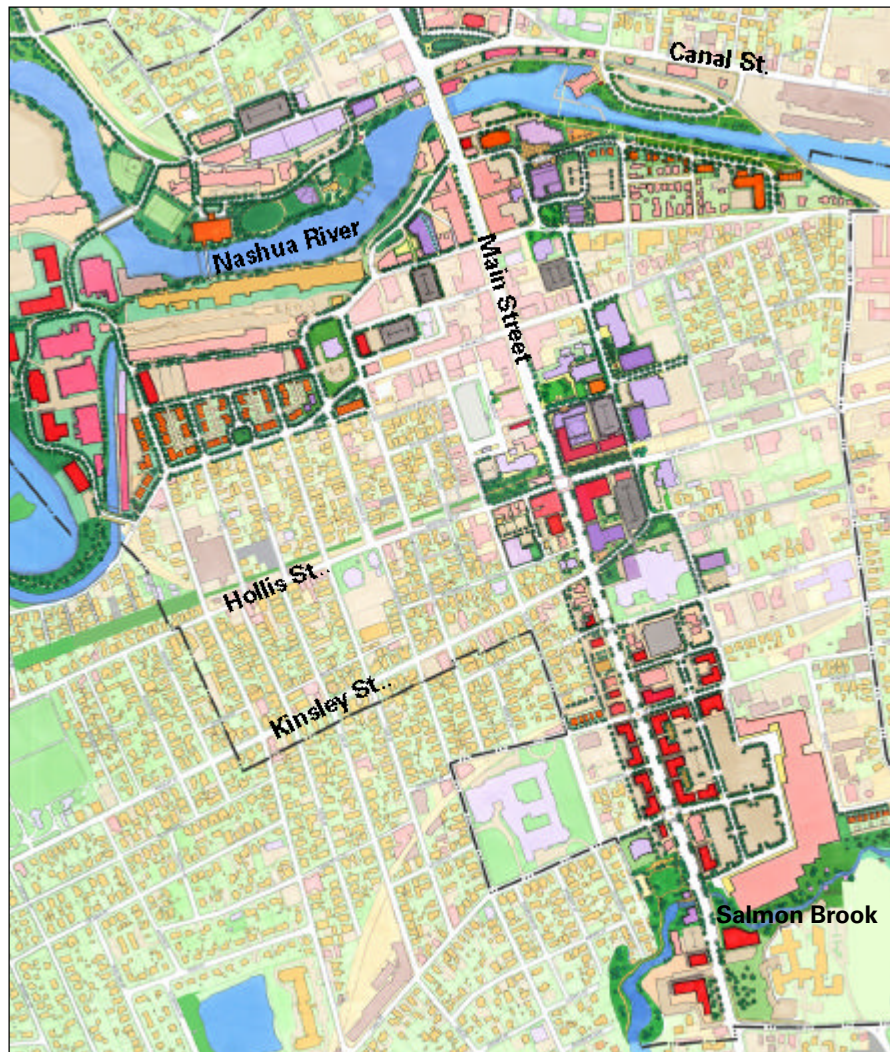
The Master Plan

The foundation of the Master Plan is public involvement. Extensive outreach was undertaken to insure that the Master Plan represents the ideas brought forth



The Master Plan
Public and private initiatives along the Nashua River, Main Street, and in the neighborhoods will solidify Downtown Nashua as the heart of the region.

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by the residents, stakeholders, investors, and leaders of the City. The public involvement process included no less than twenty focus groups, three public meetings, and a four day public / open charrette. In sum, over 200 individuals took part in the process.

A market study was conducted to establish feasibility of several markets within the five to ten-year time horizon of this Plan. The market study concluded that the residential market is, and will continue to be, Downtown's strongest market within this time frame. Due to the narrow marketing and appeal of suburban housing, there is a pent up demand for a wider range of housing types and markets in Downtown Nashua. Another strong market is educational, cultural and institutional uses. These uses, though often non-profit and sometimes subsidized, are critical to

diversifying Downtown's offerings and to supporting Downtown retail.

The market study and the public process both recommended the City must focus its efforts on initiatives that are inclusive of all residents of Nashua, not simply a narrow slice of the population. Therefore, whereas Main Street remains the focus of Downtown, many of the Plan's recommended actions concentrate on areas beyond the lively sidewalks of Main Street. Specifically, the Master Plan addresses areas along the Nashua River, Main Street South of City Hall, and areas to the east and west of Main Street. Design interventions at these areas are the key to broadening Downtown's appeal, maximizing its market potential, and distinguishing it from other cities in the region.



*Existing Conditions
(top)*

*Proposed Initiatives
(bottom)*

Initiatives

Nashua has been successful in building on its strengths and finding ways to bring private, locally-based efforts together to create a whole that is greater than any single part. Main Street North, between City Hall and the River serves as an example of this success.

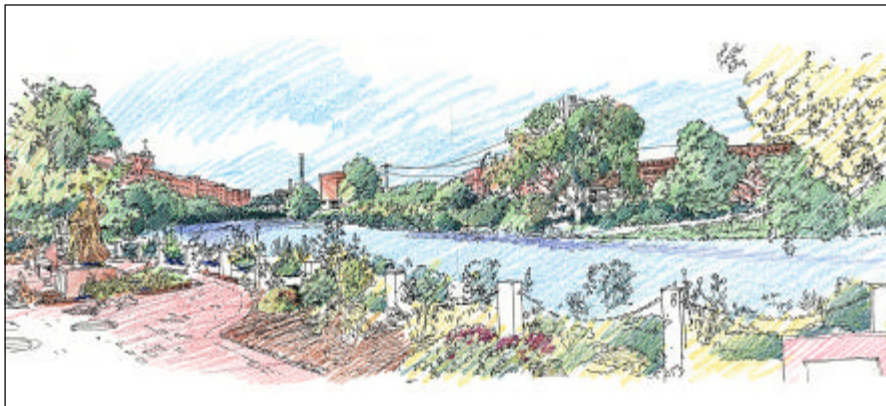
A vibrant Main Street has been created by

- public investments in streetscaping that improve the pedestrian experience
- private building renovations that build upon the City's architectural character

- locally based investors and entrepreneurs willing to provide a product distinct from competing suburbs
- an aggressive and innovative schedule of events that showcase Nashua as the center of the region

Main Street North has become the anchor for a wide range of new uses that bundle restaurants, entertainment, and retail together as sustainable development in Downtown Nashua.

This Master Plan connects complimentary Downtown businesses and destinations to create a series of initiatives around which different activities and developments are organized. Private



*Riverfront West
Existing Condition
(top)*



*Riverfront West
Proposed
Redevelopment
(bottom)*

efforts, along with public improvements and public/private partnerships have been formulated into five new primary initiatives for the City:

- 1 Riverfront West
- 2 Riverfront East
- 3 Railroad Square
- 4 Main Street North
- 5 Main Street South

Frameworks

In order to support these five initiatives, the Master Plan recommends improving upon and creating a series of frameworks that connect different parts of Downtown. The frameworks, focusing on con-

nectivity, are designed to:

- continually enhance the pedestrian experience on the streets of Downtown
- support and extend the system of bikeways and trails that link the areas of Downtown to each other, as well as the neighborhoods, and to the region's remarkable recreational and heritage amenities
- clarify pedestrian and vehicular circulation through an incremental process of converting one-way streets to two-way streets
- establish an alternative for the Broad Street Parkway that provides access



*Main Street South
Existing Condition
(top)*



*Main Street South
Proposed
Redevelopment
(bottom)*

to development parcels, connects the trail system, and improves congestion at Railroad Square

- create guidelines for architectural character consistent with the tradition of the City and the objectives of the Master Plan.

Implementation

The Master Plan will be implemented over 10 years. Upon completion, approximately 500 new residential units, and 500,000 new square feet of commercial/retail/office and institutional space will be added to Downtown Nashua. In addition, with construction of a new Riverfront Park, Performing Arts Center, Center for Nashua Heritage and Future Technology, regional and local trail connections, the downtown will become the region's center for cultural, entertainment and recreational networks.

The primary projects to be completed within three years of adoption of this Plan will include

- Main Street South Streetscape (Design and Engineering)
- Bronstein Homes (Design and Hope VI Application)
- Broad Street Parkway (Design and Engineering)
- One Way Street Conversion Study
- Center for Nashua Heritage and

Future Technology (fundraising)

Implementation of the Master Plan will create two legacies. The first legacy will be a completely revitalized downtown with a diversified economy that benefits all residents of Nashua. Downtown Nashua will solidify itself as soul of the region;; it will become an indispensable component to the region's superior quality of life.

Equally important to the legacy described above, will be the legacy of partnerships and civic cooperation that are essential to and will result from implementation of this Master Plan. The Master Plan should not be thought of as simply a way to spend public resources - rather it should be thought of as a way to form partnerships, increase investor confidence, raise capital, with the purpose of leveraging public resources.

The ideas set forth in this plan come from the vested interests of the City's diverse body of residents and investors. The realization of these ideas rely on a coordinated, cooperative and active public sector working in tandem with a entrepreneurial private sector. The results of this private-public partnership will be a lively and vibrant Downtown for all Nashuans; place that embodies both its history as well as the ideals and aspirations of the region.

Site Analysis

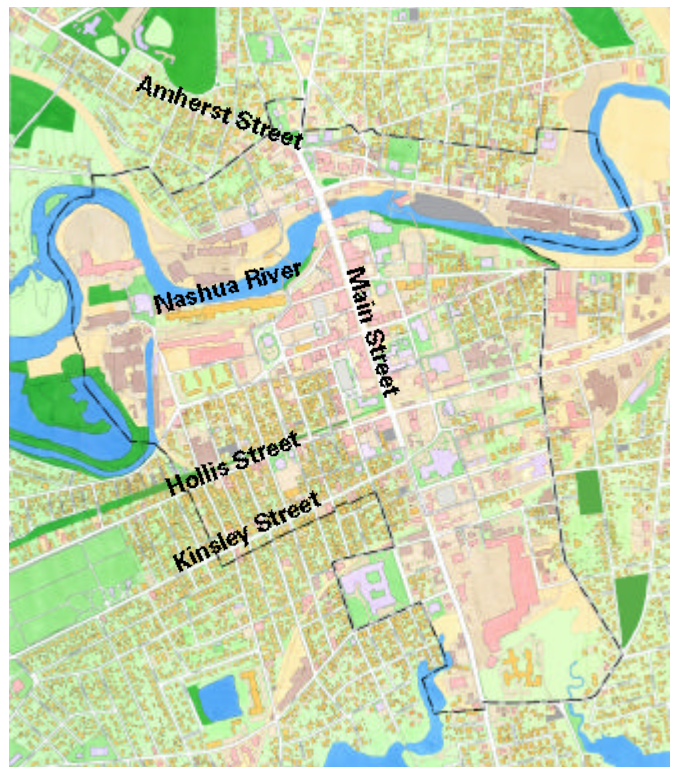


I X-Rays

A UDA X-RAY DRAWING ALLOWS the Master Plan team to better understand a study area, as well as reminds city residents and stakeholders of the myriad assets and natural patterns found throughout their City. An X-Ray drawing isolates one physical element or category of land use at a time to illustrate patterns and opportunities difficult to perceive when analyzed together. By studying the various natural and man-made systems, urban designers can unveil the underlying patterns, problems, and opportunities of a given site. Often, from these natural, historic, and development patterns, the beginnings of strategies and solutions emerge.

UDA X-Rays are drawn at several scales. By examining the site within the context of the region, city, and immediate study area, one can begin to see the physical forces that impact and influence it. In the case of Nashua's Downtown, X-Ray drawings at the regional scale illustrate the City's strategic location within the region, while X-Rays at the site scale depict the immediate patterns of the built and natural landscape within the boundaries of the City.

The study area for the Master Plan is centered on Main Street but extends east and west to include the adjacent neighborhoods and cross streets-- the extents of the historic and traditional Downtown.



Regional Locator Map

(top left)

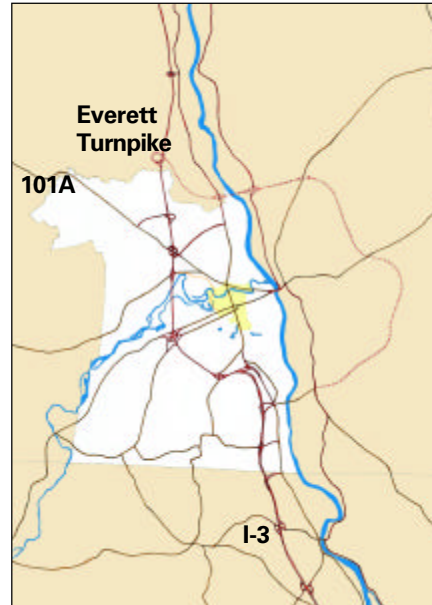
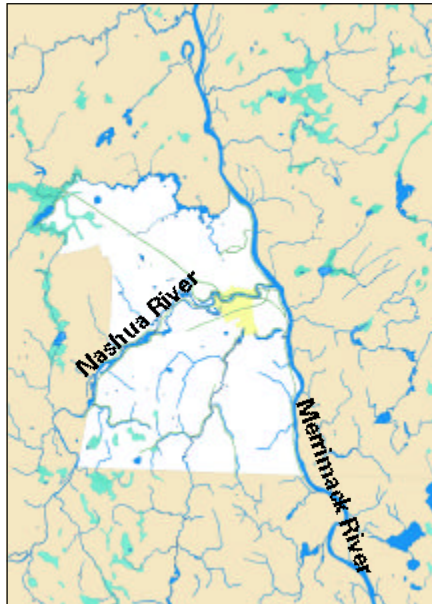
Located just north of the Massachusetts State border, Nashua is the outermost city in the Boston “commuter-shed.”



Regional Natural Features

(bottom left)

Located at the confluence of the Merrimack and Nashua rivers, the City is connected to watersheds and natural systems that reach out to the region in every direction.



Regional Highways

II

(top right)

The City of Nashua is located at the convergence of several arterial roads, each well-connected to the Interstates.

Regional Streets

(bottom right)

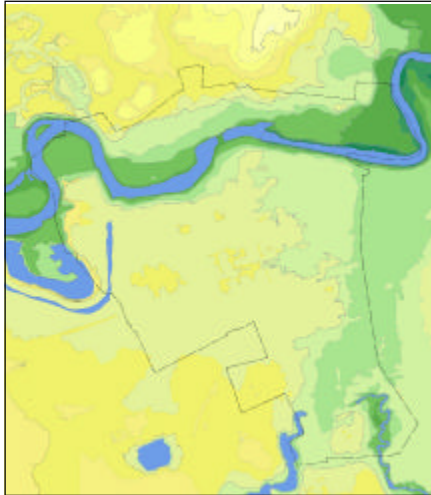
Main Street is one of only two surface road crossings of the Nashua River within the City. Downtown Nashua comprises a collection of colliding, irregular grids and connective arterial roads.



Topography

(top left)

The Downtown gently slopes to the Nashua River from the south, with the land dropping more steeply to the River on its north side. The lowland stretching from the Nashua River to Salmon Brook represents unstable soils for development and has therefore historically been an industrial area.



Commercial

(middle left)

Main Street retail development north of Hollis Street is a relatively dense concentration of small-scale, street-oriented buildings that form pedestrian-scaled spaces. South of Hollis Street, the commercial buildings on Main Street are scaled to the automobile.



Residential

(bottom left)

Many of the City's neighborhoods are intact; however, their edges are severely frayed. Nashua's neighborhoods engage neither the river, nor Main Street.



Streets

(top right)

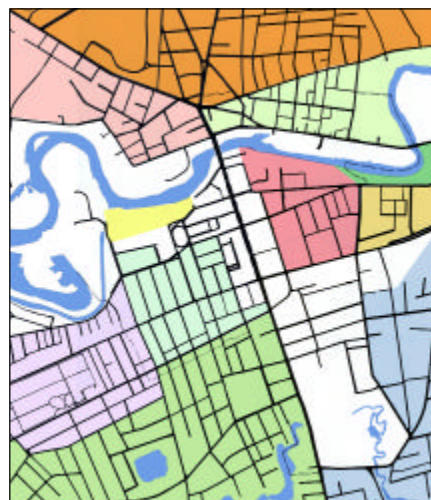
The framework of Downtown Nashua is a collection of several grids. South of the Nashua River, the grids are organized relative to Main Street. North of the river, the street grids respond to the diagonal arterials that converge at Railroad Square.



Figure Ground and Flood Plain

(middle right)

Downtown is generally comprised of medium-sized commercial buildings, small-scale residential buildings, and long, linear industrial buildings. Several of the original Nashua Manufacturing Company buildings, now converted to other uses, were originally built in the 100-year flood plain.



Neighborhoods

(bottom right)

The neighborhoods of downtown Nashua are defined by the arterials and corridors that carry cross town traffic.

Institutions and Open Space

(top left)

The core of Downtown Nashua has many institutional buildings but no central park or public gathering space. The beginnings of a network of trails follow the natural areas along the Nashua River and the abandoned rail line.



Parking

(bottom left)

Surface parking lots are a dominant land use in much of Downtown. Only a few parking garages presently exist forcing much valuable Downtown real estate to be used as surface parking.



Industrial

(top right)

Industrial uses dominate the edges of the Nashua River and rail lines. Throughout the City, many of the former industrial uses have been converted to offices or commercial space.



Connectivity

(bottom right)

Despite having tight grids of streets and being located at the traditional center of the City, few streets extend beyond the Downtown.



II Precedents

THE BEST DESIGN SOLUTIONS ARE NEVER IMPORTED. Rather, they emerge from the inherent patterns and vernacular of a region. Nashua is one of several Merrimack Valley river towns unique even within the greater region of which it is a part. Planned as settlements to support the textile manufacturing industry in New England in the early nineteenth century, Nashua and its sister cities along the Merrimack are strikingly similar in their history and planning, and each provides lessons to learn from the others. By studying both the urban form, as well as redevelopment that has occurred along this important natural corridor as its economy and development base has completely changed since its founding, Nashua can develop strategies to both root itself in a unique past while also planning for an ever-changing future.

Other Merrimack Valley cities similar in both form and history to Nashua, such as Lowell, Lawrence, and Haverhill, provide precedents of exemplary spaces, strategies, and approaches to urban design steeped in a similar regional flavor and industrial past.

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III Historic Analysis

ALTHOUGH DANIEL ABBOTT IS WIDELY REGARDED as the “Father of Nashua,” the area of the City now known as Downtown was designed by Asher Benjamin from 1824 through 1827. Known for his use of the pattern book for residential design, Nashua was Benjamin’s only foray into town planning. Benjamin originally planned Nashua as an industrial town with an area for the region’s textile manufacturing on the river, drawing power for its operation from Mine Falls located three miles west. His ideas were utilitarian and simple yet strong enough to be perceived even today. A north-south main street provided a bridge across the Nashua River at its north end, leading to Union Square, a public space and railroad depot known today as Railroad Square. A cross-axis was established along Factory Street, which defined the heart of the Downtown. At one end of the Factory Street axis stood the Olive Street Church, later Pilgrim Church; and at the other end, the great smoke stack of the Nashua Manufacturing Company. These simple but powerful urban relationships remained intact for over 100 years - evidenced by the fact that Factory Street remains the City’s most vibrant Downtown cross-street.

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The Olive Street Church, Asher Benjamin’s beautiful religious structure, defined the end of a visual axis between itself and the Nashua Manufacturing Corporation buildings.

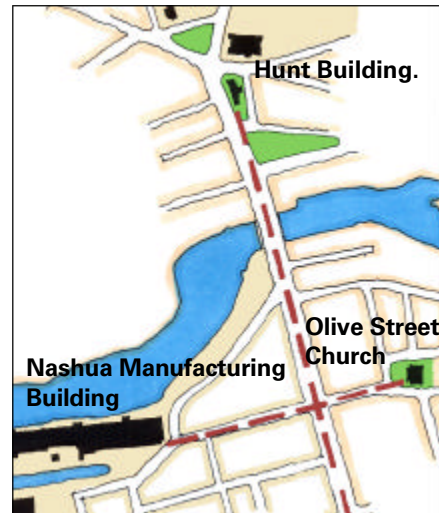


After World War II, the integrity of Benjamin's simple yet powerful plan began to erode. In 1984, the Pilgrim Church was demolished. Indian Head Plaza, a 6-story office building surrounded by parking, and a small, nondescript park was built on the former site of the Church. Very quickly, one of Nashua's landmarks was lost and Benjamin's plan was weakened.

Other changes since 1960 further affected the Downtown. A few important streets were vacated, traffic patterns were changed, buildings were demolished, and parking lots were built in an effort to accommodate the automobile. These measures were largely ineffective in saving Downtown from its slide in the 1970's. Specifically, the Bronstein Apartments, Courthouse Oval, Library development and Spring/Elm Street Parking lots, although well conceived had negative urban design consequences.

Nashua weathered the 1980's and early 1990's with a series of master plans that introduced some important public improvements and traditions, such as the distinctive brick sidewalks. Nashua's resurgence in the late 1990's is due in no

small part to a revived appreciation for the City's heritage. This statement was confirmed in the public outreach effort, as it became clear there was an understanding and stewardship of the history and heritage of Nashua. This public awareness has manifested itself in restored buildings, civic programming and events, such as the Holiday Stroll, vintage signage on private buildings, and historically-appropriate streetscaping. These actions have re-established a contemporary authenticity to the City, have created a valuable sense of place, and have made Downtown Nashua a regional



Benjamin's Plan for Nashua

Asher Benjamin (bottom) created a plan for Nashua where axial relationships provided focus upon prominent City structures. Pearl Street was bookended by the Nashua Manufacturing Company and the Olive Street Church, later, Pilgrim Church, while the Hunt Building terminates Main Street in the north.

destination

New appreciation for local culture, as well as the City's new technological development will have a home in the proposed Center for Nashua Heritage and Future Technology, located on Fac-

tory Street and overlooking a new river-front park. This museum will present Nashua's great history as the firm footing on which the City can consider the challenges of the future.

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Changes since 1960

- 1** *Bronstein Apartments - Street vacated for public housing*
- 2** *Courthouse Oval - Streets reconfigured into a disorienting one-way system*
- 3** *Nashua Public Library - Park Street vacated creating a block with poor access*
- 4** *Spring and Elm Streets - Many buildings demolished for parking lots*